



## Iowa Smart Planning Draft Recommendations Survey Overview of Responses

October 13, 2010

The Iowa Smart Planning Draft Recommendations Survey was posted to the Iowa Smart Planning Web site and publicized beginning September 16, 2010. Task Force members were encouraged to send information about the public input process, including the survey, to their constituents, and the survey was referenced in the press release issued on September 16, 2010, announcing the public input process. The surveys were provided at the five public input meetings in Spencer, Red Oak, Waverly, Coralville, and Boone, and webinar participants were directed to the electronic form. All surveys were collected at the public input meetings or submitted via email to the Rebuild Iowa Office. Responses were requested by October 10, 2010.

Respondents were asked to indicate support, neutrality, or opposition to each of the draft recommendations approved by the Iowa Smart Planning Task Force on September 15, 2010. Two qualitative questions were asked at the end of the survey. The responses to those questions are included at the end of this document.

### Quantitative Results

Surveys were submitted by 58 persons/entities. Responses are presented below. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

| <u>Recommendations</u> |  | Support | Neutral | Oppose |
|------------------------|--|---------|---------|--------|
| <b>1</b>               | <b>Establish a framework to coordinate planning, geographic information and data systems, and state-level investment.</b>  | 93%     | 4%      | 4%     |
| 1.1                    | Establish the GIS & Data Systems and Planning Coordination Councils, and the Office of Planning and Geographic Information Systems (OPGIS).  | 82%     | 14%     | 4%     |
| 1.2                    | Integrate the Smart Planning Principles into the State's Enterprise Strategic Planning Process.  | 71%     | 25%     | 4%     |
| 1.3                    | Iowa Councils of Government (COGs) should serve as the geographic entities for regional smart plans.   | 64%     | 25%     | 11%    |
| 1.4                    | A Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) for each region should be established by the COGs for local smart plan review.   | 52%     | 30%     | 18%    |
| 1.5                    | A COG or COGs should be established in central Iowa for the seven counties (Boone, Dallas, Jasper, Marion, Polk, Story, and Warren Counties) not currently served or served in-part by an existing COG by June 30, 2015. | 66%     | 29%     | 5%     |
| 1.6                    | Identify "State of Iowa Smart Planning Goals and Benchmarks" as statewide goals for the OPGIS.   | 77%     | 18%     | 5%     |
| <b>2</b>               | <b>Require completion of regional comprehensive smart plans within 5 years after legislation is enacted.</b>   | 79%     | 14%     | 7%     |
| <b>3</b>               | <b>Create financial incentives and offer technical assistance to incent smart planning at both the regional and local levels.</b>  | 98%     | 2%      | 0%     |

|          |   |     |     |    |
|----------|---|-----|-----|----|
| 3.1      | Create a sustainable funding source for regional smart planning conducted by the COGs.  | 68% | 27% | 5% |
| 3.2      | Create a sustainable funding source for a smart planning grant program at the state level for local smart plan development and implementation.  | 68% | 26% | 6% |
| 3.3      | Expand the menu of financing options available to local governments to develop and implement smart plans.   | 80% | 15% | 5% |
| 3.4      | Provide training and technical assistance to state agencies to facilitate integration of the Smart Planning Principles into state investment decision-making processes, particularly grant programs.  | 80% | 20% | 0% |
| 3.5      | State agencies should set a threshold of or give additional consideration for having a qualified smart plan to receive state funding for infrastructure and public facilities projects that affect land use, transportation, stormwater management, and floodplain protection, where appropriate. | 76% | 18% | 5% |
| 3.6      | Create a smart planning education program for local government staff, officials, and the public.  | 87% | 11% | 2% |
| 3.7      | Develop a smart planning toolbox to be housed at OPGIS that will serve as a one-stop-shop for smart planning information and resources.   | 78% | 20% | 2% |
| 3.8      | Develop an accessible statewide GIS and data management system.   | 85% | 13% | 2% |
| <b>4</b> | <b>Develop a watershed planning and coordination program, including goals and strategies referencing land use for each of Iowa's nine major river basins.</b>   | 89% | 7%  | 4% |
| <b>5</b> | <b>Make the definition of "local comprehensive plan" uniform throughout the Iowa Code.</b>  | 91% | 7%  | 2% |

## Qualitative Results

The following comments were included with the survey results. They include responses to two statements: 1) Recommendations that should be changed, added, or deleted and 2) Additional comments and suggestions. Not all surveys included written comments.

### Survey #1

I support all the recommendations of the Task Force. I feel that #4 is an especially crucial component to Smart Planning. "Develop a watershed planning and coordination program, including goals and strategies referencing land use for each of Iowa's nine major river basins."

I notice incentives are mentioned in #3 "Create financial incentives and offer technical assistance to incent smart planning at both the regional and local levels." I believe that incentives, in some instances, are not enough. There need to also be consequences for poor land use and management. For instance, stream buffers should be mandated, not just incentivized. We also need more stringent restrictions for development in floodplains.

Thank you for the chance to give input.

### Survey #4

- Should continue prioritizing watershed planning and grants toward impaired waterways.
- Grade existing comprehensive plans as to how they integrate Smart Planning Principles.

### Survey #5

Additions pertaining to Item 4: Involve the agricultural community/producers

- Consider requirements for vegetated stream bank buffers and field perimeter buffers to reduce erosion and pollution
- Consider incentives to encourage no-till farming practices

### **Survey #6**

Delete "and paths built from 3.2.3. Add a new goal: "3.2.4 Increase the number of bikeways, bicycle facilities, walkways, and paths built." The current goal locks Iowa into a path is the only bikeway or walkway mindset. The suggested language opens the door to bike lanes, sharrows, and more. Bicycle facilities could address bike racks on buses, bike parking, or similar infrastructure. A good plan should allow for innovation. Look to Wisconsin, Oregon, California and Colorado for examples.

Also, perhaps investments in alternative transportation such as trains, van pools, etc.

### **Survey #7**

Establish an Office of Sustainable Planning and Programming to coordinate Iowa's land use planning and management and coordinate work done by other state agencies. This would avoid duplication of efforts and save the tax payers money while still spending tax dollars where they are vitally needed. Many small towns and rural areas could never afford to do high quality smart growth planning. Even the more populated regions with COGs (presuming they are reestablished) could not do a consistent and high quality job of smart growth planning without a central state agency to provide oversight, guidance and possibly enforcement. The Smart Planning effort would dramatically lose effectiveness without an umbrella agency to coordinate all efforts statewide.

We are in a particularly good position right now to ask the Federal government for a modification of funding rules to allow some of the vast sums now being spent on damage relief to be spent instead on prevention. The Office of Sustainable Planning and Programming could potentially be funded with that money. Even if it were completely funded by State dollars, we will be money ahead in the long run.

### **Survey #8**

Need to make training a priority for local planning & zoning officials. Also all floodplain administrators in the state. Need to implement a statewide floodplain group now and not later. As a floodplain administrator I feel we get no training until it is too late and the group would be a way to do that.

### **Survey #9**

Development of one regional plan vs. state, regional and local may help ease duplication and expense.

### **Survey #10**

Perhaps there should be a provision for a multi-jurisdictional smart plan that may be a plan for a transportation corridor or other shared feature.

In addition, state code needs to make provision for jurisdictions to jointly levy or share taxes and revenue to spur multi-jurisdictional economic development. This is probably beyond the scope of the legislation of the Task Force, but it would be beneficial in the Mason City, Clear Lake, Cerro Gordo County area.

If a plan is prepared by the COG for a city or county, it should be assumed that it will conform to the regional smart plan. Based on this, the process for approval could be streamlined and approved by the Planning Advisory Committee bypassed. Since there are no mandates, incentives must be included.

**Survey #13**

I would like to see a high degree of coordination between Priority Growth Areas and Transportation Oriented Design. Meaningful financial incentives designed to force those new growth areas to create transit plans prior to development.

**Survey #14**

A central Smart Planning Clearinghouse is a great idea, along with training on how to use and implement strategies. Creating a new, separate entity may slow the process. Is it possible to use existing entity to support/administer programs? The new body should guard against poor planning practices, not enforce particular developments.

**Survey #16**

- 1.4: Probably should let the COG determine how they plan their region.
- 1.1: Don't like the idea of building a completely new office, should be put in DOM, maybe DOT
- More emphasis on affordability for low/middle income families in terms of housing choices, proximity to services and employment, and access to public transit.
- Look at/use health impact assessments.
- Is there a significant burden to plan a "smart plan" versus a "not smart plan?"
- Didn't see any ideas about regional transit.
- Worried that these recommendations will be forgotten after the cost estimates are determined for this whole project and smart planning will go by the wayside.

**Survey #20**

I think the benchmarks are a good idea, but they need to have an incentive to fulfill them. In the presentation, they said that meeting benchmarks would not be required to receiving funding. Why not? School districts should be encouraged to do smart planning, too.

**Survey #21**

Very skeptical of a statewide GIS. These are very technical programs, varying layers of information at multiple quantities. It has taken city and county 20 years to get where we are and several million dollars later. Don't understand how this will be coordinated. Very diverse interest in the state. Often these plans will be so high level that they have no way of guiding policy decisions.

**Survey #22**

Fund is always an issue, especially now. Good emphasis on GIS, a lot to be gained. Perhaps need more emphasis on flood prevention is required.

**Survey #23**

"Goal #3: Livable Communities & Quality of Life" lacks a comprehensive vision – where could a discussion of social service, environmental pollution reduction, and economic development planning be included as part of livable communities and quality of life? By limiting smart planning to housing diversity and transportation diversity, I think the vision of smart planning is made too narrow.

**Survey #28**

Regional planning makes no sense when agriculture is exempt. Before legislation, a funding source should be established. No unfunded mandates.

**Survey #29**

Financial incentives are important! Could there be penalties (return the money) if plan isn't followed?

**Survey #30**

Consider a hosted solution for GIS as opposed to an actual server that requires IT services, backup, redundancy, and disaster recovery. If this is not a major hindrance to local government's generating comprehensive plans, why isn't funding in place?

**Survey #31**

Add universal design features as a dedicated part of smart planning. Recommend where OPGIS should be located. The location will impact what is done. Have the courage to give it your best judgment. If judgment is independent agency – say so! Based on question and answer period, it is evident that there is more detail in the framework that makes it difficult to answer this survey; in general, I support the idea.

**Survey #34**

The problem small cities have with COGS is that they are over an hour or more away in some cases. So setting up meetings with council and committees can be a hassle. It would nice if there was a standard form to give to cities to get their comprehensive planning updated or started. Kind of like a fill in the blank template for cities 5,000 & under, 10,000 & under, etc... So that the City Councils and committees can take ownership of the plans. With COGS, sometimes they come in and talk way above our heads, then fill out a huge document and Council never looks at it because they are too embarrassed to ask questions. Small towns can get lost in the whole process, and if funding is tied to it, they lose out on the funding. It takes a lot of work, but I think the procedures and some of the accountability needs to be put back on the local volunteers and community leaders, so they stay involved and don't just assume the COG knows exactly what they want in the plan. The other problem is I don't see a step by step guide for cities. Like first do this, or have this meeting, then do this... If COGS can provide that to cities ahead of time, it may help keep the costs down for everyone.

**Survey #36**

I think that it is important to note that the government in Iowa is the single largest employer now. Government continues to grow, and I don't see this slowing or stopping growth of government but increasing it. Continued growth in government only means increased cost to the tax payer either directly to the individual or indirectly through companies that provide a product or service in their cost of doing business in this state. If this is a good thing and economically sustainable, fund it through all levels of government with existing funds and budgets investing in the future savings just like a private company does and would do. If it isn't economically sustainable, then process should be scrapped. Builders and developers respond to the desire and need of the public. Educate the public to want this, and or need this and then it will be provided. If they don't then stop spending time on thinking that government has the answers, and knows better than the consumer. DO NOT generate NEW funding sources TAXES to do this, please...

**Survey #37**

More outreach needs to be done to the general public to educate and engage them on the Smart Planning Principles and how they will possible affect and benefit themselves, their family and their communities.

While I agree with the recommendations, I feel that many need to be given more specific details. One of the main areas of concern is the funding sources through which these initiatives will come through. Many of these offices and plans to be created are valuable however without proper funding, will not be done well. It should not be the responsibility of the COG's to raise user fees or charge their communities more for these services.

It will also be crucial for technical education to be given to the individuals who will be working with the smart planning process and creating these documents so that they can be made as effective as possible.

### **Survey #39**

Items 1 and 3.8 already have some momentum. AS this moves forward, I think it is important to take an inventory of what pieces are already in place and reuse some of what is already in place. Many individuals in the GIS community have invested a lot of effort in construction some of the components of what eventually would be a spatial data infrastructure for the state. Activities such as the ICIT data repository, the Iowa Geospatial Data Clearinghouse, state-wide geospatial metadata training, GIS ROIs and the Iowa DNR NRGIS data library are just some of the activities that have been working towards a GIS data infrastructure over the last decade or longer.

### **Survey #40**

This plan makes a lot of sense. A few comments:

- \* Chain of command - figure 1.4 shows GIS/Data Systems Council and Planning Coordination Council as separate and at the same level. What if they don't agree and give contradicting guidance to the OPGIS?
- \* The format of GIS varies from county to county. The format of parcel # varies from county to county though most contain section-township-range. Exporting basically parcel polygons and numbers to a shape file may not be as bad as if you also want additional GIS data now stored differently from county to county. Some counties do their own GIS work inhouse and some use a vendor that has their own standards they follow so may not be as flexible
- \* A lot of GIS work has been done by counties and there has been some discussion on county level of trying to set standards - be sure to get a lot of input from county GIS personnel
- \* Some counties sell their data and some give it away so there may be resistance depending on who would have access to county data

### **Survey #42**

I'd like to know more about the abilities of COGs to provide regional planning services, especially if grant funding is contingent upon having a "smart" plan. My experience with COGs is that member cities drop out and rejoin on a whim or perceived slight. This affects funding, which affects staff levels and work outputs.

### **Survey #43**

Support making regional plans mandatory, but need to keep them advisory. There should be guarantees that the various committees and agencies formed are not dominated by developers, the chambers of commerce, the Farm Bureau, or other groups that already hold positions of power in regard to land use decisions. Good science must be emphasized in regard to environmental decisions. In general, I support this, but it must not be allowed to concentrate power and become an obstacle to positive environmental progress. Nothing should prevent a city or county from adopting a plan that is more restrict than the regional one. For example, if one county in a region wants to do more to protect farmland, or to manage stormwater, then its regional plan calls for, this should not be prevented. For instance, this happens now in regard to citing large hog lots. The state restrictions pre-empt any attempt at local regulations. Strongly support regional watershed planning.

### **Survey #44**

- 1.1: does a new state office need to be formed or can these duties be rolled into an existing state agency?
- 1.5: simply mandate a COG be formed with/by those 7 counties to more closely match Region 11 as it exists for transit and transportation planning.

- 2: Tight timeframe when this not even in effect yet. 7 or 10 years?
- Why would the region (COG) review and “certify” the smart plans if they may have written the plan in the first place? Shouldn’t the state review the plans against a standard?

#### **Survey #45**

We need to involved drainage districts in Iowa.

#### **Survey #46**

Will there be standardized state-wide zoning? Need greater building construction inspection. Watershed management plan – does it include Ag land tile water and surface water sheeting into ditches? Update drainage district rule and appeal process.

#### **Survey #47**

Use an existing department rather than creating new government department. Need rules immediately after the regional planning mandate is passed. Make sure that funding makes it affordable for entities to do a plan. Opposed the threshold of a having a smart plan to access funding streams, but would support additional points. Do not make the plans so intensive that it makes the development of the plan too expensive that entities cannot afford to do it. Do not make it so plans become a “fill in the blank” plan that entities develop them only to get grant funding. Entities do not need another “put on the shelf” plan, makes sure these plans have involvement.

#### **Survey #49**

In the 13 elements, Agriculture and Historical Resources should be two separate elements. Mandating regional plans is the key. The case for funding should stress how the costs from lack of planning and poor planning are passed onto local governments and taxpayers.

#### **Survey #50**

I think regional plans are very important. They should foster cooperation instead of competition among local entities. Guidelines should be as concrete as possible so they are not open to a lot of interpretation. Education will help local entities see the advantages to smart planning and regional planning.

I like the 13 elements in requirement #1 of recommendation 2. Public input is more challenging on regional plans because they include more than the local areas people are already familiar with.

#### **Survey #51**

I am concerned that using COG boundaries is not as effective at planning for flood mitigation as using river basin boundaries. It surprises me that Recommendation 3.7 does not also require legislative/administrative action steps in order to institute the toolbox. Won’t funding be necessary? How will best practices be agreed upon? I think the task force has done a great job! Thank you for all your hard work!

#### **Survey #53**

Recommendation 1.4 should contain more specific language about "addressing prevention and mitigation of, ... and recovery from catastrophic flooding"  
Iowa needs to make watershed planning (and more specifically water quantity/flooding aspects) a priority in all departments and fund and support these efforts. The need for coordination in the 9 basins is absolutely critical in developing effective planning and implementation, yet it is unfunded. Preventative flood planning is a great investment given the cost of flood recovery. Fully fund 9 large basin coordinators and give them the tools they need to succeed. Further, develop priorities within each watershed to dictate where we will and won't implement BMPs and where they have the most

impact. Create a uniform, statewide infrastructure at all levels (from large basins to small, local watersheds) that encourages success. This includes somewhat standardized outreach materials, watershed planning tools, training related to landowner outreach, effectiveness monitoring infrastructure, etc. Our work in small watersheds is critically important to the larger picture, yet these positions are poorly supported in terms of infrastructure for success, as well as funding. Making these more successful should be the ultimate goal of watershed planning. (these suggestions also relate closely to Recc. 4).

Recc. 1.6, Goal 1: The concept of Integrated Watershed Resources Management should be reviewed and considered for improving our state's water resources. Elsewhere these principles are implemented resulting in greater success and improved cooperation/collaboration. There are many principles that Iowa can quickly adopt that will quickly improve how we do business! These principles are analogous to more general 'smart planning' principles, but are more focused on water resources planning.

If a technical advisory council is created, how will it be an agency priority? When budgets are tight will people participate? I'm not opposed, but without teeth, this might be difficult. GIS Data is not too difficult to find, but a centralized library would be useful. More importantly, if such a clearinghouse is created, would be to ensure data is updated and all data is available. City or County data is much harder to access, but should be made available in a similar fashion!

Creating a new office of planning and GIS makes me a bit nervous. How do we ensure effectiveness? Will this just create another agency that makes effective implementation more tedious and difficult? Again, I'm not against it, but it needs to be effective. Can it have a sunset clause, based upon outside review, to determine if it is making an impact?

I strongly support the Rec 1.2 "proved accountability and transparency on metrics". Also, will establishing a statewide vision create a mechanism to minimize overlap of duties/programs among Departments within the state?

Recc. 1.6, Goal 4.2. Iowa has long needed priorities for Natural Resource protection. We currently work under the incorrect assumption that everything is a priority, yet we see little impact in general. We need to identify where natural resources protection (whether for endangered species, water quality improvement, water quantity/flood abatement, source water protection, etc. etc.) areas are located, then 'stack' these ecosystem services-focusing on areas of greatest impact. The converse is also true... there are places we must not devote public funded efforts. The quicker we get down this road, the quicker we will see impact. We must also lead by example to encourage federal programs to show similar prioritization. A great majority of our land use improvement projects are dependant on federal programs. We must demand prioritization.

#### **Survey #54**

Re 1.3 and 1.4. I attended the Oct. 6 meeting in Coralville and support concerns raised about having the COGS serve as the central organizing factor. I realize many COGS work well and that it is practical to rely on them for the most part if we want to get planning underway sooner than later. However, I agreed with several individuals who pointed out that using the watersheds as the primary organizing principle for regional planning would be ideal. I believe that item 4 should be strengthened so that it can be effective -- can you add that there will be guidelines or requirements, not just goals land strategies, re land use in the river basins? I also have concerns about the COGS because they are based on the 99 county-system, which, with all due respect to needs of the past, is antiquated in some ways. I realize it's beyond the scope of the smart planning effort, but the county-system ideally should be overhauled to create fewer counties that make more sense from a planning point of view and perhaps provide cost-savings.

Since half of Iowa towns have populations under 500, as was pointed out at the Oct. 6, meeting, I wonder if there are strategies to learn from the state's network of community colleges about how best to

do outreach and interact with smaller towns and their citizens. I applaud your efforts. I hope to be a part of successful comprehensive planning and/or training others to do planning in Iowa once I earn my degree in planning. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

**Survey #57**

Include objective criteria for process and substance so that approval of all annexation petitions/applications is dependent upon municipal compliance with smart plan elements of comprehensive plan. Applicable to all cities population 1000 or more or classified as within growth area/region (defined).

**Survey #58**

Why would we want to add another body for COGs to staff? Just tweak the makeup of their policy board to be geared toward planning. Even diversifying the makeup of transportation technical committees to serve a dual purpose makes more sense than creating an additional body.

Expanding the scope of the existing MPO is the only reasonable option for a COG in central Iowa. Merge a slightly expanded Metro Advisory Council into the MPO and provide resources for specialized planning staff. Many of the transportation planning staff are already educated in broad based planning.

While the idea of savings combining smaller sheds is appealing financially, I think it is a disservice to not address them independently of each other with the same approach. Each faces its own impacts. I think each river watershed regardless of its size, needs to stand alone just like States in the US Senate.